
Program Mission

Support sustainable water resources management to meet the present and future water needs of people and the natural environment, in partnership with Washington communities.

Environmental Threats

Historically, Washington residents have enjoyed an abundance of clean and inexpensive water in a relatively water-rich state. But water availability is no longer being taken for granted. Washington increasingly lacks water where and when it is needed for communities and the environment, largely due to unprecedented population and economic growth.



Lake Roosevelt (mouth of the Colville River) in Stevens County, April 2005. During normal flow, much of this riverbed would be under water.

There is heightened awareness of water needs and availability. A number of factors have combined to build the awareness:

- The threat of extinction to once abundant fish stocks and the Federal Endangered Species Act response.
- Recurring droughts resulting in dry streams, withered crops, dead fish, and concern for wildfire hazards and reduced hydropower production.
- Record low stream flows and declining aquifer and ground water levels in some areas of the state.
- The lack of water for further allocation without impairing senior water rights, instream flows, or depleting aquifers.

- Legal uncertainty related to the validity and extent of water rights and claims, which includes federal and tribal rights and claims.
- An absence of established streamflow levels for most state rivers and streams.
- Inadequacy of information on water availability, streamflows, and groundwater.
- A growing awareness and concern over the long-term effects of climate change on the water supply.

As the state adjusts from a historic era of water abundance to one of water limitations, progress is being made to more actively account for and manage water by increased funding, shifts in policy, and improved management.

Authorizing Laws

Water use and water resources management are regulated by a complex web of statutory law (passed by legislation) and case law (court interpretations). Statutory laws include:

- Chapter 90.03 RCW, Water Code (1917)
- Chapter 90.44 RCW, Regulation of Public Ground Waters (1945)
- Chapter 18.104 RCW, Water Well Construction Act (1971)
- Chapter 90.14 RCW, Water Right Claims Registration and Relinquishment (1967)
- Chapter 90.22 RCW, Minimum Water Flows and Levels (1969)
- Chapter 90.54 RCW, Water Resources Act (1971)
- Chapters 90.38 and 90.42 RCW, Trust Water Rights Program (1989 and 1991)
- Chapter 90.80 RCW, Water Conservancy Boards (1997)
- Chapter 90.82 RCW, Watershed Planning (1997)
- Chapter 43.99E RCW, Water Supply Facilities - 1980 Bond (Referendum 38)
- Chapter 43.27A.190 RCW, Water Resource Orders
- Chapter 43.83B RCW, Water Supply Facilities
- HB 1832 - Year 1 Water Law Reform of 2001 two line water rights processing (Chapter 237, Washington Laws 2001)

- *2ESHB 1338 - municipal water supply and efficiency requirements (Chapter 5 Laws of 2003, First Special Session)*

Constituents/Interested Parties

- *Agricultural groups*
- *Business and industry*
- *Local governments: cities, counties, utilities, irrigation districts*
- *Local watershed planning groups*
- *State and federal agencies*
- *Indian tribes*
- *Environmental organizations*
- *People near dams and owners of dams*
- *Real estate developers*
- *Recreational water users*
- *Sport and commercial fishers*
- *Water and power utilities*
- *Water-right holders*
- *Well drillers*

Major Activities and Results

Sustain Water Resources

Assess, Set, and Achieve Instream Flows

The agency evaluates and sets instream flows, which are fundamental to water resources management. Instream flows are used to determine how much water needs to remain in streams to meet environmental needs, how much can be allocated, and when to regulate junior water users based on flow levels. The agency acquires water and uses other management techniques to restore and protect flows, while meeting out-of-stream needs. (Authorizing law - 90.22 RCW)



Measuring stream depth

Result

Progress toward setting and achieving instream flows to benefit people, fish, farming, and the environment.

- Set 19 instream flows in the 2005-07 biennium, working with local watershed groups and in select basins not engaged in watershed planning.
- Acquire 10,000 acre feet of water to improve instream flows.

Support Local Watershed Management of Water Resources

The agency works with local watershed planning groups, state and federal agencies, and tribes to address water quantity issues under the Watershed Management Act and other local efforts. The agency provides technical support and studies for local watershed planning groups to develop and adopt local plans. Adopted plans serve as the basis for sound water resources management. After plans are adopted, the agency engages with local watershed groups to implement the plans. (Authorizing law - 90.82 RCW)

Result

Development, adoption, and implementation of sound local watershed management plans

- Provide technical assistance and support for development, adoption, and implementation of local watershed planning.
- Support other geographic initiatives including the Columbia River, Walla Walla, Nooksack and others.

Support Water Use Efficiency

The agency provides agricultural, commercial, industrial and non-profit water users with services that deliver water savings. These include information, planning, technical, engineering, and financial assistance. Support also is provided for water re-use projects and to the Department of Health for municipal water conservation. (Authorizing law: RCW 90.54.020 (7))

Result

Increased water, energy, and cost savings to protect the environment, increase business competitiveness, and reduce pressure on water supply and waste treatment facilities.

- Increase the volume of water saved as a result of water use efficiency.

- Provide technical and financial assistance to a limited number of agricultural, commercial, industrial, and non-profit water users.

Provide Water Resources Data and Information

The agency develops, manages, and shares water resources data and information essential for modern management of water resources. Sound data and information are critical to local watershed groups, conservancy boards, businesses, local governments, non-profit groups, the Legislature, other agencies, and the media. The information supports daily agency operations, including making water allocation decisions; setting and achieving stream flows; identifying the location and characteristics of wells, dams, and water diversions; supporting compliance actions; metering; tracking progress; communicating with constituents; and serving other water resource functions. (Authorizing law - 90.54.030 RCW)

Result

Increased availability of accurate and timely water resources data and information essential for modern water management, and improved public service and business decisions.

- Develop and maintain data and information systems for an increasing number of external users (watershed groups, conservancy boards, businesses, etc).
- Improve the collection, preservation, and availability of data and information for water allocation, dam safety, well construction, instream flows, and communication.

Promote Compliance with Water Right Laws

The agency helps ensure that water users comply with the state's water laws so that other legal water users are not impaired; water use remains sustainable over the long term; and the environment is protected for the benefit of people and nature. This includes water metering and reporting, education, technical assistance, and strategic enforcement in egregious cases. (Authorizing law - 90.03.400 RCW)

Result

Increased awareness of, and compliance with, the state's water right laws so that legal water users and applicants for water rights are not impaired, water use remains sustainable, and the environment is protected.



Methow River

- Expand water use metering and reporting.
- Provide compliance information and assistance and take strategic enforcement actions.
- Broaden geographic capacity to regulate water use during periods of low flows on streams with set flows.

Allocate water

Manage Water Rights

The agency allocates surface and groundwater to meet the many needs for water. It does this by making decisions on applications for new water rights applications for changes to existing water rights to reallocate water. Water rights decisions require consideration of many of factors, including determining whether water is available and whether existing rights would be impaired. The agency is responsible for managing an existing water rights portfolio of over 49,000 certificates, 3,000 permits and 166,000 claims. (Authorizing law - 90.03 RCW)

Result

Timely and sound decisions on applications for new water rights and changes to existing water rights to allocate and reallocate water. More active management of the existing water rights portfolio.

- Make decisions on 800 water right change applications.
- Make 260 decisions on new water right applications.

Adjudicate Water Rights

Adjudication is fundamental to sound water management by increasing certainty regarding the validity and extent of water rights and reducing water conflicts. It is a judicial determination of existing water rights and claims, including federal, tribal, and non-tribal claims. The current focus is

supporting the Yakima River Basin adjudication. (Authorizing law - 90.03.110 RCW)

Result

Removal of major uncertainty regarding the validity and extent of the water rights in the Yakima Basin (Yakima River Basin Adjudication).

- Completion of the Yakima River Basin Adjudication.
- Preparation for future adjudications or other forms of water rights settlement.

Prepare and Respond to Drought and Climate Change

The agency provides services to reduce the impact of droughts and to prepare for future droughts and climate change. When droughts are declared, services include providing water via emergency transfers, water right changes, and temporary wells. The agency also provides drought related information and financial assistance and coordinates drought response efforts. Emerging information on climate change is also monitored for future water supply implications. (Authorizing law - 43.83.B RCW)

Result

Mitigation of drought effects and climate change through improved planning, communication, coordination, and loss-prevention efforts.

- Timely processing of temporary water right applications during periods of drought.
- Effective planning, communication, coordination, and response to drought and climate change.

Protect Public Health and Safety by Ensuring that Wells and Dams are Safe

Regulate Well Construction

The agency protects consumers, well drillers, and the environment by licensing and regulating well drillers, investigating complaints, approving variances from construction standards, and providing continuing education to well drillers. This work is accomplished in partnership with delegated counties. The agency also delivers technical assistance to homeowners, well drillers, tribes, and local governments. (Authorizing law - 18.104 RCW)

Result

Improved protection of consumers, well drillers, and the environment and reduction in the risk of aquifer contamination and cleanup costs.

- More wells constructed to standard by trained and licensed well drillers.
- More wells inspected in partnership with delegated counties.

Ensure Dam Safety

The agency protects life, property, and the environment by overseeing the safety of Washington's dams. This includes inspecting the structural integrity and flood and earthquake safety of existing state dams not managed by the federal government; approving and inspecting new dam construction and repairs; and taking compliance and emergency actions. The agency also provides support for water storage projects. (Authorizing law - 90.03.350 RCW)



Failed dam

Result

The risk of potentially catastrophic dam failures is reduced, increasing the safety of people and property located below dams.

- Inspect 56 high hazard dams.

Major Issues

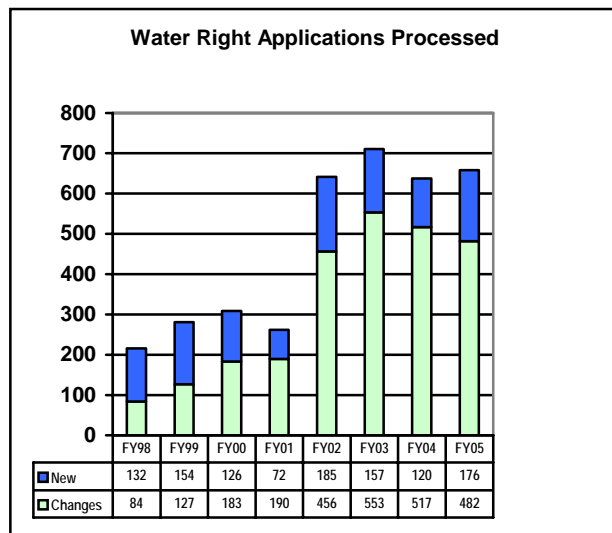
Improving Water Management Capacity

Increasing water demand, recurring droughts, and growing awareness and concern over the impacts of climate change on water supplies and the environment have highlighted the need for more active water management.

Over the past several years, the state has reinvested in water policy and funding to address the increased demands on water. This has resulted in some progress, but also has highlighted the mismatch between existing water management

capacity and increasing water management challenges:

- **Instream Flows:** After more than a decade-long break, a concerted effort is underway to set instream flows on streams and rivers.
Challenge: Successfully setting a record number of flows, implementing local water management plans, and taking other actions to make progress in achieving flows.
- **Watershed Planning and Implementation:** Most of the state is engaged in local watershed planning, and some plans are already being implemented to meet water needs and to protect the long-term sustainability of water resources.
Challenge: Bringing local planning to successful conclusion; funding and implementing plans that include actions ranging from storage projects to compliance.
- **Water Rights Applications:** Water rights change applications are being processed more quickly to facilitate sale, transfer, and changes in use to make better use of existing water supplies.
Challenge: Continue progress on processing water rights while improving consistency and quality of decisions and catching up with post-decision work of permit extensions, certificates and other work; and working on applications for new water.



- **Innovative Water Supply Solutions:** As traditional supplies of water become increasingly scarce and requests for new water rights are denied, water users are turning to innovative water supply solutions.

Challenge: Supporting the transition to innovative water supply solutions; and developing awareness, incentives and institutional capacity to capitalize on new water efficiency technologies, water storage, reclaimed water, and stormwater management projects.

- **Water Use Accountability:** More water is being accounted for through water use metering and stream gauging.
Challenge: Increasing water use metering and reporting, maintaining, and expanding the stream gauging network, responding to local watershed requests for compliance service, and taking actions on egregious violations of water law.
- **Settlement of Water Rights:** The Yakima River Basin Adjudication is nearly complete, bringing clarity and certainty regarding the validity and extent of surface water rights and claims in the basin.
Challenge: Increasing the clarity of water rights and claims throughout the state by improving the system of resolving water disputes, including unquantified federal and Indian water rights.
- **Water Data, Information, and Transparency:** More water resources data and information are being made available internally for improved decision making and externally for enhanced public service and transparency.
Challenge: Developing, maintaining, and enhancing water data systems, including mapping, to keep pace with increased demands of modern water management, public service expectations and technology.

Water Resources Budget

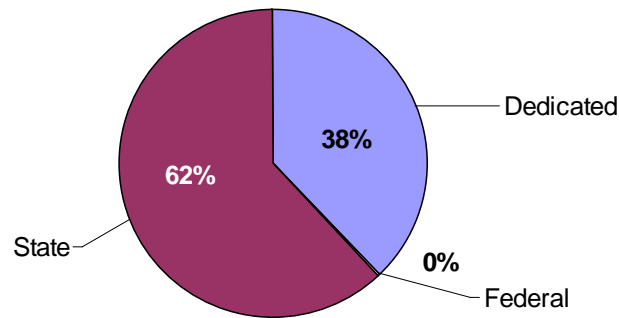
Budget = \$35.4 million; FTEs = 148.9

State	(\$)	Amount	Sources	Uses
General Fund – State	21,933,612		Multiple	Water rights decision making, county water conservancy board assistance, compliance, data management, public information, dam safety, water use efficiency, watershed support, instream flows, Yakima adjudication and Columbia River activities (\$177,065 proviso).
Federal				
General Fund – Federal	163,321		Federal grants	Dam safety inspections and Yakima Enhancement liaison.
Dedicated Funds				
General Fund – Private/Local	3,091,900		Grants and other receivables.	Instream flows, water acquisition and cost reimbursement contracts for water rights processing.
Reclamation Revolving Account	2,362,401		Well construction fees; well operators' licenses, and hydropower fees	Administration of the well construction oversight program including revenue transfers to delegated counties with well construction management authority, compliance, well information systems (\$615,130 proviso). Contract with the US Geological Survey for stream gauging.
Emergency Water Projects Revolving Account	1,393,403		Previous bond sales; loan repayment and interest payments;	Drought relief activities; primarily permit staffing for Ecology. Grants to state agencies and others for drought relief activities.
Referendum 38 (Agricultural Water Supply Bond Funds)	317,290		Bond sales; loan repayments and interest payments	Staff support for grants and loans for the improvement and/or construction of agricultural water supply facilities. Technical assistance to irrigation districts. Operation and maintenance of Zosel Dam (Lake Osoyoos in Okanogan County)
Basic Data Fund	310,000		Contributions from private & local entities	Pass through to the U.S. Geological Survey for stream gauging data collection and studies.
Drought Preparedness Account	221,000		Previous bond sales, transfer from Emergency Water Fund, loan repayments and interest payments	Drought relief projects and activities to prepare for future droughts.
Water Quality Account	5,648,619		Excise tax on tobacco products	Water rights decision making, county water conservancy board assistance, compliance, data management, public information, water use efficiency, watershed support, instream flows.
TOTAL	\$35,441,546			

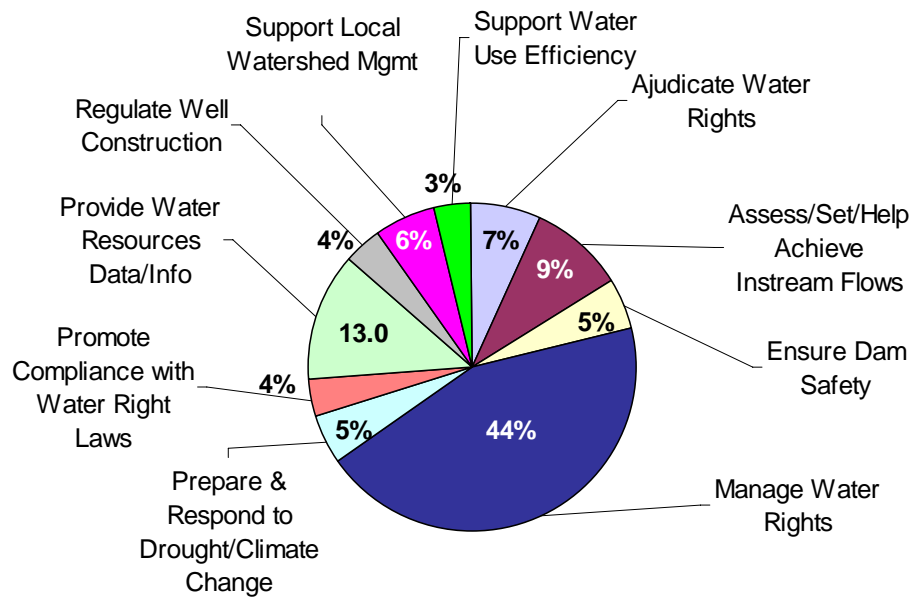
Capital Budget Funding: \$72,472,396

State Building Construction Account	49,150,403	Sale of bonds	Water measuring devices, on-farm irrigation efficiencies, water conveyance improvement or replacement, water storage investigations, water acquisition, watershed councils, agriculture water supply, Comprehensive Irrigation District Management Plans, Columbia River feasibility studies and implementation.
State and Local Improvements Revolving Account (Ref. 38)	13,552,410	Sale of bonds; loan repayment and interest payments	Grants/loans for agricultural water supply facilities. Grants for on-farm water use efficiency improvements, water conveyance improvements and storage studies.
State Drought Preparedness Account	7,971,692	Previous bond sales, loan repayments and interest payments	Grants/loans for drought related agricultural and municipal water supply facilities projects. Purchase and lease of water rights to improve stream flows in fish critical streams
Water Quality Account	1,797,891	Excise tax on tobacco products	Grants for on-farm water use efficiency improvements. Drought well pumping mitigation projects in the Yakima basin and water conveyance improvements

Water Resources Program Dollars by Fund Source



Water Resources Dollars by Activity



Activity	Dollars	FTEs
Adjudicate Water Rights	2,498,879	8.6
Assess, Set, and Help Achieve Instream Flows	3,272,150	15.4
Ensure Dam Safety	1,773,920	7.8
Manager Water Rights	15,494,985	62.5
Prepare and Respond to Drought and Climate Change	1,736,197	2.8
Promote Compliance with Water Right Laws	1,290,096	6.8
Provide Water Resources Data and Information	4,556,736	22.8
Regulate Well Construction	1,402,314	6.8
Support Local Watershed Management of Water Resources	2,146,284	9.5
Support Water Use Efficiency	1,269,985	5.9